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The Shah's Fall: Sorting Out the Blame

There is nothing surprising about politicians exploiting the hostage situation in Iran, but there is something shabby about that self-serving and less-than-accurate article in which our former ambassador to Iran gives his version of Who Lost Iran.

William H. Sullivan, who presided over the Tehran embassy during the fall of the shah, writes in *Foreign Policy* magazine that this near-calamity for U.S. interests occurred because "U.S. policy formulation broke down." The culprit in the whole mess was President Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, according to Sullivan.

It is not possible to determine whether Sullivan is merely engaging in a few recriminations against Brzezinski, who is the favorite villain of the Foreign Service pros, or whether he is trying to bludgeon the Carter administration to the benefit of Ronald Reagan. Whatever his intentions, he misleads the American people in several important respects.

Sullivan writes: "By November 1978 Brzezinski began to make his own policy and established his own 'embassy' in Iran. That embassy materialized in the person of Ardashir Zahedi, the shah's ambassador in Washington, who returned to Tehran at Brzezinski's behest with the explicit mission of pulling the shah's resolve together so that he could suppress the revolution."

Brzezinski denies vehemently that he sent Zahedi to Tehran, and I believe him, because I know why Zahedi rushed home.

In October 1978, I had the last on-camera interview that the shah granted before he was overthrown. When I left that interview, a friend and aide of Zahedi, a man named Dowlatshahi, asked me: "How did it go?"

"The shah is a beaten man," I replied. "He is not the same man I interviewed a couple of years ago. The shah has given up."

The following night members of my TV crew and I went to a party at Zahedi's house, hosted by one of his

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relatives. When I walked in, I was stunned to see Zahedi.

"Dowlatshahi telephoned me to tell me what you said about the shah. I have come home to hold my king's hand," Zahedi said. He then apologized for leaving the dinner and went to the palace where, he told me later, he spent the entire night trying to stiffen the monarch's resolve.

This country faces enough dangers and difficulties regarding Iran without any election-year spasms of instantly revised history determined to blame one party or another for "losing Iran."

On Dec. 13, 1978, on my return

from Tehran, I wrote this: "Before I went to Iran in October to do a television special on the impending crisis, officials here gave me an incredibly rosy report. When I returned with a report about 'Our Crisis in Iran,' a senior State Department official called the Iranian Embassy to apologize for my pessimism. Fortunately, he got an Iranian who said: 'If you don't believe Rowan's warning, you don't know anything about Iran.'"

Belatedly, that American official and many others are now trying to figure out what the future holds.

When I first talked to Sullivan during that trip to Iran, he gave me the same rosy view of the situation that the CIA had given. After I went to Isfahan and interviewed students and others opposing the shah, I returned to Tehran and said to Sullivan: "Your people sure as hell aren't talking to the same Iranians I'm talking to."

Not just the Central Intelligence Agency, but Sullivan's entire embassy, must share the blame for a report to President Carter that the shah was secure and Iran was "not even in a pre-revolutionary stage," a report that led the president to utter unprecedented public criticism of U.S. intelligence operations.

I write this simply to warn Americans not to be misled, in an election year, by one man's tendentious treatise about a development for which he and many others must share some blame. And that includes those who presided over U.S. policy toward Iran and the shah long before Jimmy Carter and Brzezinski assumed power.